

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03

RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 AID-20 OPR-02 SY-10 ACDA-19 IO-13

DPW-01 EUR-25 NIC-01 RSR-01 /160 W  
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O P 201215Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5473

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

CINCPAC PRIORITY

DEPCHJUSMAGTHAI PRIORITY

CDR USSAG NKP PRIORITY

AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 5798

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PGOV, LA

SUBJECT: ATTEMPTED COUP IN VIENTIANE: WRAP-UP

1. GENERAL THAO MA, EXILED IN BANGKOK SINCE LEADING AN ABORTIVE COUP IN 1966, TRIED AGAIN DURING EARLY MORNING AUGUST 20. MA AND FELLOW EXILEE COLONEL BOUNLEUT SAYCOCIE LEADING 20 TO 30 TROOPS CROSSED MEKONG FROM SISIENGMAI, THAILAND, BEFORE 0500, AND TOOK CONTROL OF LAO NATIONAL RADIO AND PORTIONS OF WATTAY AIRFIELD. HE WAS JOINED BY ABOUT 200 OTHERS FROM VIENTIANE AREA. MA ISSUED THREE COMMUNIQUE OVER NATIONAL RADIO SAYING THAT COUNTRY IN GRAVE CRISIS, LAO ARMED FORCES CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO HAVE SOUVANNA AS PRIME MINISTER, THE COST OF LIVING IS RISING, INSTRUCTING POPULATION AND FOREIGNERS TO REMAIN CALM, AND ORDERING ALL MILITARY, POLICE AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO REPORT TO MILITARY CAMPS IN VIENTIANE AREA BY 1200.

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2. APPROXIMATELY FOUR T-28 AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF FROM WATTAY AIRFIELD AT 0600 AND SOMETIME LATER BOMBED CHINAIMO ARMY CAMP CAUSING SOME DAMAGE, KILLING 3 (INCLUDING GEN. KOUPRASITH'S NEPHEW) AND WOUNDING 6. FOLLOWING INTIAL

FLIGHT OF T-28'S AIR FORCE COMMANDING GENERAL SOURITH DON SASORITH AT 0745 ORDERED WATTAY CONTROL TOWER TO HOLD ALL TAKEOFFS AND LANDINGS UNLESS CLEARED BY HIM. ALL U.S. CONTRACTED AIRCRAFT WERE GROUNDED. C-47 AIRCRAFT FROM SAVANNAKHET LANDED AT 0805 CARRYING THREE PASSENGERS, ALL REPORTEDLY FOLLOWERS OF GENERAL PHOUMI NOSAVAN. PARTICIPATION OF THAO MA AND BOUNLEUT, PLUS SAVANNAKHET ARRIVALS, FUELED RUMORS THAT PHOUMI NOSAVAN HAD ORGANIZED COUP ATTEMPT AND WAS RETURNING VIENTIANE. THIS RUMOR PROVED FALSE. USAIRA OFFICERS AT WATTAY REPORTED THAT REBEL FORCES AT WATTAY WERE UNKNOWN TO THEM. HIGH WATER MARK OF INSURGENCY WAS CONTROL OF RLAF HQS, T-28 AND CIVILIAN RAMPS AT WATTAY AIRFIELD.

3. FAR BEGAN TO GET ORGANIZED AND REACT AROUND 0800 AND BY 0930 SITUATION WAS BEING BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL WHEN FAR TROOPS RECAPTURED ARMY MATERIAL HEADQUARTERS. ABOUT ONE HUNDRED FIFTY TROOPS FROM CHINAIMO ACCOMPANIED BY ELEMENTS FROM THE ARMORED REGIMENT RETOOK AIRPORT BY 11:15. T-28 FLOWN BY GENERAL MA WAS HIT BY GROUND FIRE, CRASHED ON LANDING, BUT MA WAS NOT SERIOUSLY INJURED. HE WAS TRANSFERRED TO CHINAIMO AND EXECUTED THERE BY A FAR OFFICER; WITH GENERAL KOU PRASITH NEARBY. COLONEL BOUNLEUT AND THREE OTHERS COMMANDEERED RLAF HELICOPTER AND FLED SOUTHEAST. THEY LANDED NORTH OF THAKHEK WHEN HELICOPTER RAN OUT OF FUEL. UNCONFIRMED REPORTS INDICATED THE GROUP CROSSED BY BOAT INTO THAILAND. COUP ATTEMPT ENDED IN FAILURE BY 1200. THROUGHOUT COUP ATTEMPT THERE WAS LITTLE USE OF FORCE AND LITTLE SHOOTING, ONLY EXCEPTIONS BEING BOMBING AND SOME STRAFING DURING CHINAIMO ATTACK, AND FIRING AT AIRCRAFT BY GROUND FORCES.

4. THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT FAR FIELD GRADE OFFICERS WERE INVOLVED IN OR SUPPORTED COUP ATTEMPT. SENIOR FAR OFFICERS, INCLUDING ARMY COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL BOUNPONE MAKTHEPHARAKS, DEFENSE DELEGUE SISOUK NA  
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CHAMPASSAK, DEFENSE MINISTRY DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL THONGPHANH KNOSKY, CHIEF G-2 GENERAL ETAM SINGVONGSA, CHIEF OF STAFF PHASOUKSOMLY, AND ARMY TRAINING DIRECTOR VANNASANG SAYASANE SPENT MOST OF MORNING AT PHONE KHENG MILITARY CAMP. ARMY DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL KOU PRASITH ABHAY AND REGION V COMMAND GENERAL THONGLITH AND GEN OUDONE SANANIKONE WERE AT CHINAIMO. DEPUTY MR V COMMANDER GENERAL AT, UNDER THONGLITH'S COMMAND, LED TROOPS THAT CAPTURED WATTAY AND TOOK THAO MA. AIR FORCE COMMANDER GENERAL SOURITH DON SASORITH WAS ALSO AT PHONE KHENG MOST OF MORNING. FAR LEADERSHIP APPARENTLY SUPPORTED PRIME MINISTER THROUGHOUT COUP ATTEMPT AS WAS EVIDENCED BY THEIR ACTIONS.

5. CHARGE REPORTED COUP ATTEMPT TO PRIME MINISTER AT 0645, WENT IMMEDIATELY TO LATTER'S HOME, AND OFFERED PRIME MINISTER USE OF AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE, WITH ARMY ATTACHE AS ESCORT, WHICH WAS ACCEPTED. PRIME MINISTER REMAINED THERE THROUGHOUT MOST OF MORNING WHILE HE MET WITH DEFENSE DELEGUE SISOUK, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER LEUAM INSISIENGMAI, MINISTER INTERIOR PHENG PHONGSAVANE, PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER NGON SANANIKONE AND OTHERS. PRIME MINISTER ALSO WAS IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH CHARGE DURING THIS TIME AND MADE USE OF USAID TELEGRAPHIC FACILITIES TO INFORM KING IN LUANG PRABANG OF SITUATION. AT 0930 ARMY PSYWAR RADIO BROADCAST PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT THAT HE REMAINED PRIME MINISTER, HAD SITUATION WELL IN HAND, AND THAT PEOPLE SHOULD REMAIN CALM.

6. ARMED FORCES THROUGHOUT COUNTRY REMAINED LOYAL TO GOVERNMENT. SECOND STRIKE DIVISION COMMANDER GENERAL THAO LY IN SAVANNAKHET REPORTED REQUEST FROM GENERAL BOUPNE TO MOVE A COMPANY OF TROOPS FROM MR III TO VIENTIANE BY HELICOPTER. THAO LY ANNOUNCED HIS LOYALTY TO BOUNPONE BUT COULD NOT SEND THE TROOPS BECAUSE HE LACKED SUFFICIENT AIRLIFT CAPABILITY. THE AIR FORCE COMMANDER IN MR III ALSO PLEDGED HIS LOYALTY. NO UNUSUAL MILITARY ACTIVITY WAS NOTICED IN MR I, ONLY USUAL NUMBER OF TROOPS AT KEY GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, BRIDGES AND THE RADIO STATION. GENERAL VANG PAO IN MR II STATED IN LONG TIENG THAT HE WOULD ONLY CONFIDENTIAL

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TAKE ORDERS FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OR THE KING. MR IV REMAINED CALM.

7. CHARGE, AFTER INSURING SAFETY AND COMFORT OF PRIME MINISTER, MET WITH PATHET LAO DELEGATE PHOUMI VONGVICHIT. CHARGE REASSURED PHOUMI THAT U.S. STRONGLY OPPOSED MA'S ACTIONS, WOULD DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO HELP RLG TO ASSURE THAT IT FAILED, AND THAT U.S. SUPPORTED SOUVANNA 100 PERCENT. CHARGE BRIEFED AMBASSADOR UNGER IN BANGKOK ON SITUATION. CHARGE WENT TO PHONE KHENG ARMY CAMP AT 0810 TO SPEAK WITH GENERALS BOUNPONE AND SASORITH AND MINISTER SISOUK. HE STRESSED THAT THE USG SUPPORTS THE PRIME MINISTER AND WOULD USE AVAILABLE MEANS TO HELP RLG TO INSURE THE FAILURE OF THE COUP. CHARGE AT 0840 THEN PROCEEDED TO WATTAY AIRFIELD WHERE HE FORCEFULLY TALKED DOWN THE INSURGENT TROOPS. HE POINTED OUT TO THEM THE SUICIDAL NATURE OF THEIR ACTION, ITS STUPIDITY, AND THE HARM THEY WERE INFLECTING ON THEMSELVES AND ON LAOS. THROUGHOUT THE MORNING, CHARGE MADE PERIODIC CONTACT WITH AMBASSADORS FROM JAPAN, FRANCE, USSR, THE CANADIAN ICC DELEGATE AND THE BRITISH EMBASSY. WHEN MILITARY ACTIVITY CEASED AT

1130 CHARGE RETURNED TO PATHET LAO DELEGATION WHERE  
DELEGATE PHOUMI TOLD HIM THAT IF PATHET LAO HAD DOUBTS  
ABOUT US POSITION PRIOR TO COUP ATTEMPT, IT NOW KNEW  
WHERE US STOOD IN SUPPORT OF PRIME MINISTER.

8. NO UNITED STATES CITIZENS WERE INJURED DURING THE  
MORNING'S EVENTS, NO US CITIZENS WERE INVOLVED, AND NO  
US GOVERNMENT PROPERTY WAS DAMAGED.  
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## Message Attributes

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**To:** STATE INFO BANGKOK  
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